

Nepal goes viral

For once, the world is not ignoring a humanitarian disaster in Nepal. They have even named a variant after us. What the publicity has done is pushed the international community to rush oxygen and medical supplies to Nepal. Any help is useful in a crisis like this, but much of the aid being flown in contains items that Nepal can buy itself.

While there was a dire shortage of oxygen cylinders three weeks ago that led to loss of lives, the nature of the emergency has changed. Nepal's 29 oxygen factories are working at 100% capacity. The problem is not supply, but logistics and equitable distribution (see story page 5).

What we really need are vaccines — most urgently for the 1.4 million Nepalis above 65 who got their first dose of Covishield AstraZeneca three months ago, and are now past the default date for their second after India banned its export.



MONIKA DEUPALA

The lockdown should have bought us time for a mass vaccination drive, but once more we squandered two months just shutting people in their homes. The restrictions did bring down the daily caseload, but infections are likely to spike again once mobility increases, just like it did last year.

Instead of #NepalVariant trending on Twitter, we need #NepalVaccines to go viral. The United States has pledged 80 million surplus doses, but only 7 million of that in the first phase is for the whole of South and Southeast Asia. Supply bottlenecks mean the first shipments will not include AstraZeneca.

Europe has a stockpile of AstraZeneca not being used, either because of slow uptake or because of fears of clots. In France, tens of thousands of doses have gone to waste. Norway and Denmark are not using AstraZeneca anymore. Europe has pledged to donate 100 million doses this year, sell 1.3 billion doses at cost price, and gift another 1.3 billion doses in 2022, mostly through COVAX.

The 'Nepali variants' we should be worried about are the country's feckless politicians.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) last week announced a \$50 billion plan to vaccinate 40% of the world population within 2021, and 60% by mid-2022. This is all encouraging news if it happens, but the long and short of it is that for Nepalis, neither the second doses nor vaccines for the larger population are getting here any time soon.

Even Andrew Pollard of Oxford University, an old Nepal hand and one of the developers of the AstraZeneca vaccine says he feels helpless. He wrote in this paper recently: 'I felt so proud when I saw the first doses of the Oxford vaccine being administered in Kathmandu, and the hope that it brought to Nepalis, but I am now saddened to hear that further supply is delayed.'

This week, the 60-65 age group started being vaccinated with the 1 million extra doses of Sinopharm VeroCell donated by China. Negotiations with Sinopharm to procure another 2 million doses are bogged down due to contract issues.

The only 'Nepali variants' we should be worried about are the country's feckless and mutated politicians. Prime Minister Oli has replaced five Health Ministers since 2018, three of them since the pandemic began.

Since vaccines are unlikely to arrive soon, public health experts have warned us repeatedly that even after the lockdown is

eased, and even if some people are vaccinated, the only way to prevent future surges is through proper masks and physical distancing.

A recent Yale study in Bangladesh involving over 300,000 people showed that giving away free masks, spreading information about how to wear them properly,

getting celebrity endorsements, and enforcement increased mask use 10-fold.

Official figures grossly underestimate the spread and fatality from Covid-19 in Nepal. A projection by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) of the University of Washington School of Medicine shows that on 31 May when the government reported 96 deaths from Covid-19, the actual number was closer to 363.

IHME calculations also show that 1,000 fewer Nepalis will die by 1 September if 95% of people wore masks while outdoors. The government is hinting that the lockdown rules will be eased on 14 June. Since vaccines are still a long way off, our only protection is masks and minimising movement.

ON THE WEB

ECOLOGY AND ECONOMY

Great to see the direct engagement of development partners on this matter ('Importance of ecosystems for people and the planet', #1064). Now, the authorisation of extraction of sand and soil from Chure Region is an even more pressing issue regarding mass degradation of ecology and river systems and risks to lives.

Reshu Aryal

- Construction of Nijgad airport is very necessary for Nepal to accommodate the unprecedented traffic growth and for economic development, however the government must comply with the commitment to preserve the native forest and compensatory afforestation. Nepal's development partners claim the project led to the loss of up to two million native trees in an area despite government commitment not to clear more than .2 million trees and .4 million pole size trees.

Sanjiv Gautam

- Pity there has been little real investment in doing this in practice over the last 50 years ('Economic benefits of saving the ecology', Diya Rijal, nepalitimes.com).

David Seddon

- While the attention is on Chure, let's not forget the Mahabharata range. They are destroying rivers for easy money. Government is failing measurably to regulate such activities.

Kiran Jung

YOUNG NATURE LOVERS

We were profoundly enlightened by this article about the necessity of inculcating environmental responsibility in our children ('How to encourage a child's biophilia', Shristi KC, nepalitimes.com). The benefits of school premises with even a small vegetable patch seem to be enormous and facilitate their grasp of pertinence to conserve and protect the nature that is experiencing unprecedented challenges. If adults could demonstrate feasible solutions, children would emulate good examples and strive to create green communities. The concept of 'Green School' should be spread.

Himalaya Night

- I do hope we all think about how to incorporate as much engagement with natural surroundings as possible into our school curriculum. I am thinking of children during lockdown, and hoping that even those of us who do not have a garden can provide them with tubs with mud and/or sand to play with. We can also plant seeds in whatever containers we have available, and see the children's excitement in harvesting their vegetables.

Kalpna Parajuli

- I remember the Environmental Camps for Conservation Awareness (ECCA) leading this movement almost two decades back and they still do. Love to the team.

Sanjog Thakuri

POLITICKING

Nepal has been normally described as the yam between two big stones, India and China ('A yam between two Indias', Editorial, #1064). This excellent Editorial describes what ails Nepal, and in doing so, gives a detailed account of the Nepali PM KP Oli's attempts to use the dispute in India to confront a mutiny within his own party. PM Oli has been 'Modi-fied' and is playing the Hindu card: from politics to Vedic theology. He has gone from red to saffron.

Satis Shroff

- Something about deckchairs and the Titanic comes to mind.

Mark Pickett

STOLEN OBJECTS

Few years back I went to one of their museums looking for stolen statues from our tole Chyasal ('Nepal wants stolen antiquities returned from France', Alisha Sijapati, nepalitimes.com). There were many artifacts from Nepal but not that particular piece. Hope we get this back and put it where it originally belongs, in Chyasal.

Kiran Byanjankar

UJWAL THAPA

What a heartbreaking loss of a special individual, not only for Nepal, but the world at large. ('Nepal loses rare purpose-driven leader', Ashutosh Tiwari, nepalitimes.com).

Janis Randles

- An era of raising a good leadership dies. No one can fill his shoes and definitely not in our society.

Sunita Giri

- His soul is immortal. ('Ujwal Thapa's light shines on', Kunda Dixit, Issue #1064)

Ashish Khatiwada

HISILA YAMI

The word 'revolutionary' doesn't suit the Maoists and their war ('Nepal's Maoist revolution from the inside', Sahina Shrestha, #1063). It was only talk, and 17,000 Nepalis lost their lives. There was no real change.

Aditya Tamrakar

TENZING NORGAY

Congratulations for presenting this valuable write-up ('Was Tenzing a Tibetan, Nepali or Indian? It does not matter.', Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa, #1063). This gives clarity on Tenzing's identity and background and justifies him as a true South Asian. Along with Hillary, he introduced Nepal and Sagarmatha to the world and promoted Nepal's mountaineering.

Anil Adhikari

- A person's ethnicity is always important regardless of where they may reside at any given time in their life.

Sue Chamberlain

- Once he was asked about his nationality and Tenzing replied, "I was born and raised in Nepal, my heart is in Nepal, now I live in India." I think it is pretty self-explanatory.

Pukar Bhandari

Nepal Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Bonhams cancels auction of Nepali antiquities

by Alisha Sijapati

Following Nepali Times report on the auction sale and international outcry, France's Bonhams cancelled auctions of 600-year old antiquities stolen from Nepal. Read an account of events as they unfolded only on nepalitimes.com. Story also on page 6-7.

f Most reached and shared on Facebook



"If Birendra was alive, Nepal could still be a monarchy"

by Alisha Sijapati

On the 20th anniversary of the royal massacre, people who knew King Birendra and his family members pay tribute. Visit our website to access the piece, and also follow the online exchanges.

t Most popular on Twitter

How to encourage a child's biophilia

by Shristi KC

Children are born with an innate affinity for nature which needs to be nurtured into pro-environment values. Read full report online and read feedback.

“ ” Most commented

Ujwal Thapa's light shines on

by Kunda Dixit

Despite his untimely passing, Ujwal Thapa's mission to pursue integrity, accountability and responsibility in politics will inspire new generations to question and act against an outdated political superstructure. More on Thapa's enduring legacy in this tribute at nepalitimes.com.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes Everything that India has suffered since March has repeated itself in Nepal on a smaller scale. Nepal has to be prepared for the long haul.



Puja Maharjan @pujamaharjan21 Time to start preparing for the third wave already #nepalneedsvaccines



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes Bonhams cancels auction of Nepali antiquities. After international outcry, the auction of five 600-year-old gods has been called off. @AlishaSijapati reports.



Joe @joe_planet These pieces should be returned to Nepal immediately. Where art treasures were legally sold or gifted at some point in the past there's a discussion to be had, but where treasures were plainly stolen, there should be no debate.



Kashish Das Shrestha @kashishds This is pretty amazing!



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes Ujwal Thapa's light shines on. A tribute to Bibeksheel Sajha Party co-founder who lost his battle against Covid-19 at age 44. @kundadixit



Bernawha @BernadineC Saddened to see a familiar face in a Covid announcement. I met Ujwal Thapa and was impressed by the work of the Bibeksheel party during the 2015 earthquake response. He really inspired young people to lead and take action.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes "If Birendra was alive, Nepal would still be a monarchy". On the 20th anniversary of the royal massacre, people who knew King Birendra pay tribute. By @AlishaSijapati



पल @bikalpapaudel We'll never know, but the people adored him.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes Why sell Nepal piecemeal? Here is an even better idea: let's sub-contract the whole country to a company that can run it better. Ass, this week: Nepal rocks



Joseph John @josephTOI Brilliant idea! Not just for Nepal.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Here comes the rain

Let's take a break from usual political shenanigans and the gloom and doom of the coronavirus crisis and relish in the arrival of the monsoon this week.

True, rivers will soon be swollen, there will be landslides, highways will be blocked, and in the Tarai there will be inundation. All this is getting more intense with the climate emergency. Timely preparedness, especially as rural Nepal combats the second wave of the pandemic is a must but more on this on page 10-11.

But rain is the way of life in Nepal, two-thirds of the farms in the country are rain-fed. The very nature and arrival of monsoon help determine Nepal's economic growth and the GDP every year.

We are not recommending travelling during the pandemic but one can't deny that monsoon is the best time to visit Nepal with its lush greens, clear view of pearly white eight thousanders, pleasant weather and above all, the clean and crispy air.

Excerpts from the blog by Kunda Dixit 20 years ago this week from issue #45 1-7 June 2001.

There is nothing like the simple pleasure of lying dry and drowsy inside a sleeping bag on a bed of straw below a shingle roof of a Nepali farmhouse while the monsoon beats down outside. You can analyse the individual sounds: of rain drops falling on the trees, tapping on the stone tiles above your head, gathering in the gutter to splatter on the street below. When you wake up, you find it is still raining through the



mist. The ridge track has by now turned into a torrent. There is commotion on the trail as men and women shrouded in plastic and bobbing umbrellas get their hoes ready to move down to the paddy terraces for the transplanting.

Forget what the guidebooks say. Visit Nepal in the monsoon. Get wet. See the denuded slopes burst with foliage as nature gives Himalayans one more chance at regeneration — another hope to set things right. Watch Kathmandu Valley reclaim the green and turn emerald once more. Gaze down from the Jiri highway at three thousand vertical feet of stair-cased rice fields mirroring the gray sky.

Today, most tourist areas are accessible by air even in the monsoon. There is a chance your flight will be cancelled a few days in a row, but you will get there. You gather at the domestic terminal in Kathmandu as the rain thunders on the metal roof. Drenched helicopters squat grounded on the tarmac like wet dragonflies. But, surprise, the flight to Syangboche is called.

From archives material of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com

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editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com

Tel: 01-5005601-08 Fax: +977-1-5005518



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KUNDA DIXIT

22 May 2021



AMIT MACHAMASI

7 June 2021



AMIT MACHAMASI

3 health ministers in 1 year

Prime Minister K P Oli has switched health ministers five times since he assumed office in 2018

When Nepal's new Health Minister Sher Bahadur Tamang went to Kathmandu Airport on Tuesday morning to receive another international consignment of medical assistance, he was the third Health Minister since the pandemic began.

Tamang was brought into the Cabinet by Prime Minister K P Oli last week in a reshuffle in which he inducted 12 ministers from the Janata Samajbadi Party (JSP), removed prominent ministers from his own UML, and kept seven portfolios for himself for now.

Tamang had earlier sided with the Pushpa Kamal Dahal-Madhav Kumar Nepal faction of the Nepal Communist Party, but defected to the Oli side after the Supreme Court disbanded the party earlier this year.

He succeeded Hiradyesh Tripathi, who was former minister of federal affairs and general administration. Because he graduated in political science from Russia, he had been entrusted by the Oli administration to buy 5

million doses of the Sputnik V vaccine.

Tripathi had negotiated with the Serum Institute India for the purchase of 2 million doses of the Covishield AstraZeneca vaccine and even sent advance payment. But only 1 million doses were delivered, before India banned the export of vaccines.

Tripathi later blamed the Serum Institute of India's representatives in Nepal of trying to take a bigger cut from the next order of 5 million doses for the failure to procure vaccines in time. This allegation was later refuted by the representatives, Hukam Distribution & Logistics, which said it was due to India's ban, and that it was just following the law that allowed 10% commission.

As the second wave surged through Nepal in April, Tripathi said in an interview with Nepali Times that the pandemic had overwhelmed Nepal's health system and it could not contain the pandemic. He said it was now up to the public to take proper precautions.

Before Tripathi, the health minister was Bhanubhakta Dhakal, who was in charge when the first scandals broke in the procurement of Covid-19 test kits through Omni International, a local company. The kits were found to be faulty and overpriced.

Dhakal was made Tourism and Civil Aviation Minister during a reshuffle last year.

The new health minister Sher Bahadur Tamang as MP has been lobbying for the legalisation of the cultivation and controlled sale of

cannabis to lift rural livelihoods. He was at the airport on Tuesday to receive the new consignment of assistance from Germany under the European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism.

The material arrived on a Turkish Airline cargo charter that brought 62 ventilators, 27,500 FFP2 masks, 30,000 surgical masks, 100 gumboots, 200 body bags, 5 isolation centre tents, and 25,000 litres of disinfectant.

Also on hand at the airport to receive the aid package were German Ambassador Roland Schäfer, EU Ambassador Nona Deprez and Finnish Ambassador Pertti Anttinen.

Although the official daily total for confirmed Covid-19 cases has been going down, public health experts say it is an underestimation. The number of hospital cases, ICU patients and those on ventilators are all going down in Nepal's cities. However, the virus is said to be ravaging the remotest villages where access to health care is rudimentary.

They say what Nepal really needs now is vaccines. Some 1.4 million doses are needed immediately for elderly people waiting for their second dose of Covishield, and then for the 18 million adults in the coming months as the lockdown is eased.

Nepal registered 5,153 new cases on Tuesday and 6,570 recovering, which has brought the number of active cases to 82,736. The number of Covid-19 deaths in the past 24 hours was 108, with a total of nearly 9,000 since the beginning off the pandemic. 🇳🇵

prabhu BANK



Resilient farming

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA), European Union and German Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ) are partnering in a new project as part of 'Green, Resilient and Inclusive Development (GRID)' to balance agriculture with the environment.

Called 'Green Resilient Agricultural Productive Ecosystems (GRAPE)' in Nepal, the €12.35 million project aims to foster climate resilience and green economic growth in 20 districts of Karnali and Sudurpaschim provinces. It seeks to adapt Nepal's agricultural practices to climate change by identifying innovative approaches for water-efficient produce and focus on the socially disadvantaged and women.

The project is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) with the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) as well as the Natural Resources Institute Finland (LUKE). The Ministry of Land Management Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation (MoLCPA) is the lead ministry.

UNDP and Ncell

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Ncell Axiata are jointly launching the 'Greenway' campaign to promote cycling as an alternate commute in cities. The campaign will make use of existing technology to track, map, credit and reward cycling via a game in order to motivate people to use or switch to bicycles to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nepal, and Nepal's National Plan for Electric Mobility to cut 50% of fossil-fuel consumption by 2050.

"UNDP and Ncell set our shoulders to the wheels and set them in motion to keep fit, to save lives and protect the planet," said UNDP Resident Representative in Nepal Ayshanie Medagangoda Labe.

"It's a win-win game accessible for everybody. Anyone with or without a smartphone can participate and enjoy the perks, while also keeping up the wellbeing of themselves and their cities," said Cycle City Network Nepal's Shailendra Dongol. "After countless trials and tests we have a fully functioning cycle game app."



E-consultation for teachers

Midas Technologies Private Limited, PABSON and NPABSAN have joined to offer free online health consultation for a month to teachers, principals and staff of Nepal's private schools.

Via Midas Technologies' 'Mero Doctor-Online Video Consultation Service', teaching and non-teaching staff can fix appointments with over 200 practitioners. The service is available across all devices, and manuals for help are available on www.merodoctor.com/help.



ATR72 in Tumlingtar

On 4 June Buddha Air conducted a test flight with its ATR72 aircraft to the newly-upgraded Tumlingtar airport in eastern Nepal. The airline now plans to start regular Kathmandu-Tumlingtar flights with the higher capacity aircraft after the lockdown. Till now, Buddha was using the smaller 16-seater Beechcraft 1900D on the flight.



"We hope that the higher capacity ATR-72 will mean that the fares on the Tumlingtar sector will also come down," said Buddha Air's Dipendra Kumar Karna. Tumlingtar Airport serves an economically booming region with its proximity to three large hydropower projects on the Arun River. It is also the gateway to the Makalu region for treks and expeditions. With the completion of the Midhill Highway, the airport also offers easier access to Chainpur, Khandbari as well as other towns in Diktel and Sankhuwasabha.



Aviation fuel prices slashed

Nepal Oil Corporation has decided to lower the price of aviation turbine fuel (ATF) by 20%. Kathmandu airport had the highest fuel prices in Asia because of the taxes and cost of transport, but it has now been slashed further from \$893/kL to \$715/kL. Subsequently, Nepal Airlines has reduced airfares for chartered cargo flights. Fares for regular flights will also be adjusted once travel resumes, the airline announced. The fare for wide-body crafts will decline by 13% while that for narrow-body will fall by 15%.

Plantation amidst lockdown

Early and heavy rains have prompted farmers in the Far-Western Tarai districts to take to the fields quicker than scheduled, despite a lockdown in place. But shortage of fertiliser persists with continued lockdown preventing the imports. "Covid has stemmed the flow of out-migrants, so we have more people to work the fields," says a farmer in Kailali, Madhav Chaudhari.



AMIT MACHAMASI

Pandemic and the political-economy of oxygen supply

Donations of oxygen plants in response to second wave may force local producers to fold

● Kaustubh Dhital

Nepal’s oxygen emergency has eased somewhat as the Covid-19 second wave crests, but the crisis exposed serious gaps in the supply and distribution of medical oxygen with major implications for the future.

At the peak of the second wave, many Covid-19 patients died as hospitals ran out of oxygen, but with an overwhelming international response to rush cylinders, concentrators and generators, there is now the risk of over-capacity of medical oxygen post-pandemic.

Nepal’s demand for oxygen cylinders shot up to 50,000 per day during the peak of the second wave in May, with the country’s oxygen factories and hospitals only able to fill 19,000 cylinders every day. In contrast, pre-wave calculations had suggested that peak daily demand would only be about 6,000 cylinders.

Most of the 29 oxygen factories in Nepal were working at only half capacity pre-pandemic because of low demand. In fact, three of them had closed down. As the second wave hit, the plants went into full-scale production, but a shortage of cylinders meant that the excess production could not be sent to hospitals.

Meanwhile, factories relying on liquid oxygen tankers were affected by an Indian ban on export. Empty cylinders from China, Oman and other countries alleviated the shortage somewhat, while oxygen plants grappled with increasing generation capacity.

Too little too late

When the inter-ministerial Covid-19 Crisis Management Center (CCMC) finally reacted, it was too late. Its arbitrary quota system for every hospital proved disastrous.

“The quota resulted in hard-hit hospitals being undersupplied and

safer hospitals being unnecessarily saturated with cylinders,” explains Roop Jyoti, former chairman of Grande City Hospital, suggesting the problems lay in supply chain management rather than oxygen production.

Faced with mounting criticism for bungling the oxygen quotas, the Ministry Health resorted to micromanaging, and ordered suppliers to only send filled cylinders to hospitals that had its recommendation letter.

The result was catastrophic, many hospitals were either forced to refuse service or they asked families of patients to bring their own full cylinders.

In a notice posted in mid-May, Kathmandu’s Om Hospital said: ‘Under the capping made by the government on oxygen supply, we are unable to take admissions despite our willingness to provide service. We have enough manpower such as doctors and nurses to take care of patients but not enough oxygen supply.’

Families with Covid-19 patients hoarded full cylinders at home, and desperate ones rushed to the gates of oxygen factories to buy the life-saving gas. Municipalities, especially in areas with spare capacity, prevented the transport of oxygen beyond district borders.

Most of Nepal’s oxygen plants are in central and eastern Nepal. The Morang-Sunsari industrial corridor alone had five large oxygen factories with surplus capacity, but these were prevented from sending supplies to hospitals in Kathmandu and other areas with shortages.

Lack of training in oxygen flow management and ventilator use did not help matters. Makeshift local isolation centres with non-medical staff were using full flow to treat patients with mild symptoms. Hoarding and black marketing was rampant, and while large hospitals ran out of oxygen supply, local isolation centres had one cylinder per patient.

In Grande International Hospital, there was a 30% drop in oxygen demand when doctors were more judicious in oxygen use. Still, the shortage was serious enough for some doctors to ration oxygen even for their most serious patients. Others had to make the difficult choice between continuing to put patients who had little chance of survival on oxygen, or to give it to those who would immediately recover with oxygen.

Even before the pandemic, government oversight on cylinders was non-existent with no standardisation or regulation

in place regarding colour coding, pressure, price rates and deposits on oxygen cylinders.

“I used to get desperate calls at 3AM from families of patients desperate for oxygen. We were able to call up spare capacity during the second wave, especially in the east of the country, but the shortage of cylinders for refilling did create a temporary shortage,” says Gaurav Sharda of the Nepal Oxygen Industries Association (NOIA).

After the peak

With the first week of June, Nepal’s Covid-19 curve started flattening with hospitals in Kathmandu and major cities seeing fewer patients who needed to be on oxygen or in ICU.

“Compared to the devastating shortages in April and May, oxygen availability is relatively stable,” says Anup Bastola, a physician at Teku Hospital. The Ministry of Health also seems to have learnt from its mistakes, and is ensuring a more equitable supply of cylinders.

However, even as demand for oxygen goes down, overseas Nepalis and international donors are still rushing empty cylinders, concentrators, generators and liquid oxygen tanks on relief flights to Kathmandu. There are more oxygen generator plants arriving from France, the US and China this week. Concentrators and ventilators from international donors are sitting idle at some district hospitals in western Nepal because no one knows how to

operate them.

Domestic oxygen production itself is now reaching 100% capacity. Even though there is a challenge of logistics, equitable distribution, and cost, Nepal will soon have more oxygen than it needs. What the government needs to focus on is getting much-needed oxygen to rural areas where the virus is spreading house-to-house.

The flood of donated oxygen generators now means that there will be domestic over-capacity just as there was before the second wave. Nepal’s oxygen sector therefore needs to balance supply to meet demand surges and periods of low consumption.

Explains Jyoti: “Ironically, many new donated oxygen plants are being set up in hospitals in response to the second wave, so when this passes, there will be tremendous over-capacity. Regular factories would probably have to function at less than 25% capacity and will be destroyed financially.”

At Teku Hospital, Bastola says repurposing oxygen equipment could help Nepal prepare for future spikes. If there is a third wave this autumn, for example, demand would go up again. Besides Covid-19, there is also the pre-existing need for oxygen to treat the rise in respiratory ailments such as COPD and heart disease caused by worsening air pollution.

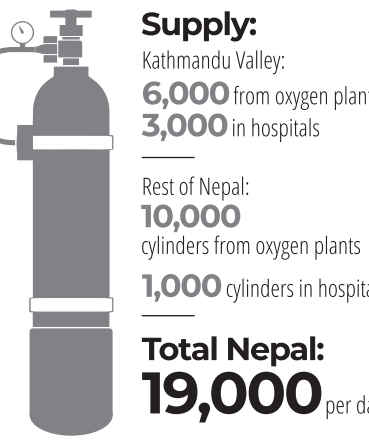
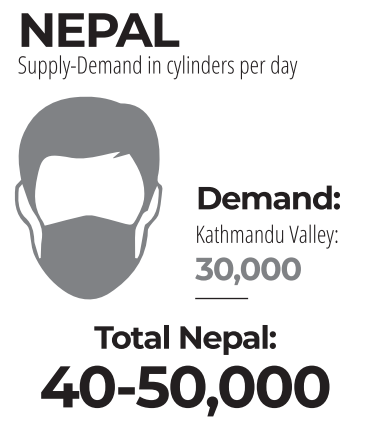
Says Sharda at NOIA: “One of two scenarios can now play out. The government could either continue its reliance on donated oxygen generation equipment, thereby driving Nepali producers out of existence, or it could encourage sustained domestic production to meet a spike in demand during future outbreaks.”

Last month, reports of Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) oxygen plants failing in hospitals, and a CCMC finding of 70% oxygen leakage in many hospitals were overlooked. These issues are structural and if resolved can help alleviate future shortages.

“The government’s approach to oxygen distribution was myopic,” says Sharda. “Oxygen is a basic product and can easily be bottled here. But they failed to consult with us producers, and now all this oversupply from abroad will jeopardise our ability to respond to future outbreaks. Plant staff should also be treated as frontline workers and have vaccinations.”

The government and CCMC failed to acknowledge that assistance was needed in the oxygen supply chain rather than production, and by allowing import of production equipment but bungling on supply management, they failed to take into account domestic generation capacity, thus increasing vulnerability in the future.

The only solution to prevent another oxygen crisis is to stop the problem at the source, by stemming the spread of Covid-19. But the lesson from the second wave is that Nepal’s government, hospitals and oxygen plants need to have standby capacity at hand for future waves. 🇳🇵



बालबालिका माथि हुने हिंसा, दुर्व्यवहार, शोषण भएको, जोखिमपूर्ण अवस्थामा रहेको वा बालअधिकारको उल्लंघन भएको छ भने बाल हेल्पलाइनको पैसा नलाग्ने

फोन: नं. १०९८ मा खबर गरौं ।



नेपाल सरकार
सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय
सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग

Locating our gods to bring them home

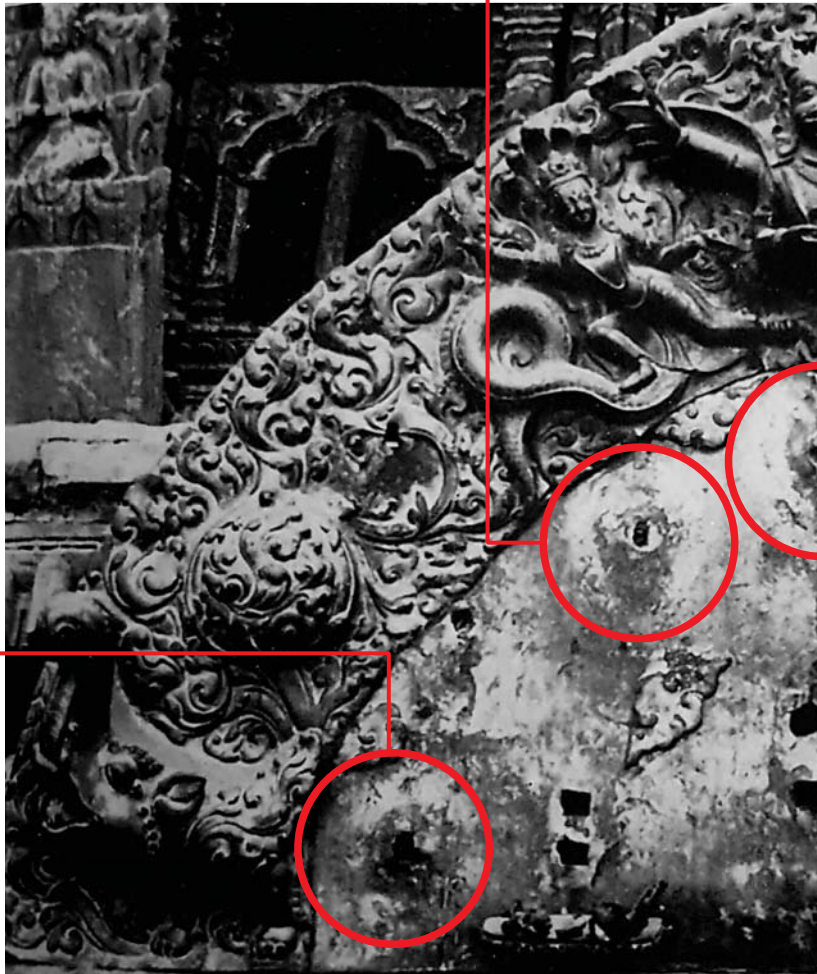
Nepal's plundered deities are being traced to museums, collectors and auction houses in the west



Nriyath



Mahalaxmi



The 600-year-old torana at the Mulchok courtyard in Patan's Taleju Temple with holes where the 12 deities were wrenched out

● Alisha Sijapati

This week, after an expose in *Nepali Times* online and intense international pressure, France's Bonhams withdrew five 600-year-old religious objects stolen from Nepal from an ongoing auction in Paris. The five gilded bronze statues were among 12 wrenched out of a *torana* at the Mulchok courtyard of Patan's Taleju Temple in the 1970s and 1980s. They were going under the gavel at the Art Bouddhiste et Hindou de l'Himalaya in Bonhams, Paris from 1-10 June through Himalayan Art Online till 10 June at an asking price from 3,000 to 5,000 euros. *Nepali Times* reported on the auction sale on 3 June, followed by messages from Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Nepal office of the Paris-based UNESCO to Bonhams and the French government to stop the auction and return the objects. "I am really happy that our gods are returning home, finally all my research is paying off, this has been

great teamwork," the anonymous administrator of the group, Lost Arts of Nepal, who first traced the gods to Bonhams, told *Nepali Times*. By 5 June, Bonhams had replied on Twitter to all officials, reporters, and institutions that had posted about the bronzes, that they were being pulled out of the auction. Heritage activists said that if the auction had gone ahead, they would have been bought by anonymous collections and could have vanished forever. The five gilded copper-bronze images of Nriyath, Mahalaxmi, Chamunda, Shiva Gana (Bhairab), and Panchmukhi Hanuman (Hanu Bhairab) that were among 12 on a 16th century frieze at the south door of the Mulchok courtyard of the Taleju Temple in Patan. On hearing the news, American arts crime professor Erin Thompson said, "Halting this sale sets an important precedent: Paris is no longer the place to go if you want to sell stolen heritage. The case shows that Nepali activists and journalists are paying close attention. The black market in stolen Nepali heritage

won't be able to operate in the dark." The whereabouts of the remaining seven statues from the Mulchok frieze is not known, but the cancellation of the auction has raised hopes that they may soon be traced since they cannot be publicly sold. In Kathmandu, heritage activists including Rabin Puri got in touch with UNESCO Kathmandu to put pressure on Bonhams before it was too late. He said, "This reminds me of the cultural repatriation of the one from Christie's in 2013, the withdrawal was a success due to teamwork." Replicas of the 12 idols stolen from Mulchok, including the five that were being auctioned by Bonhams, had been made and installed on the frieze in 2013 during a restoration of the temple by the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT). Another heritage activist, Roshan Mishra of the Taragaon Museum, said he was surprised Bonhams acted so fast to cancel the auction. He said: "This is a great precedent for the future. It sends



The 16th century Mulchok frieze with the 12 deities intact in the 1970s.

the message that Nepal's antiquities cannot be sold anywhere, anymore." The original gilded bronzes from the *torana* were first recorded in the early 1970s by Indian art historian BN Banerjee in his book, *Architecture of Nepal* for the Archaeological Survey of India.

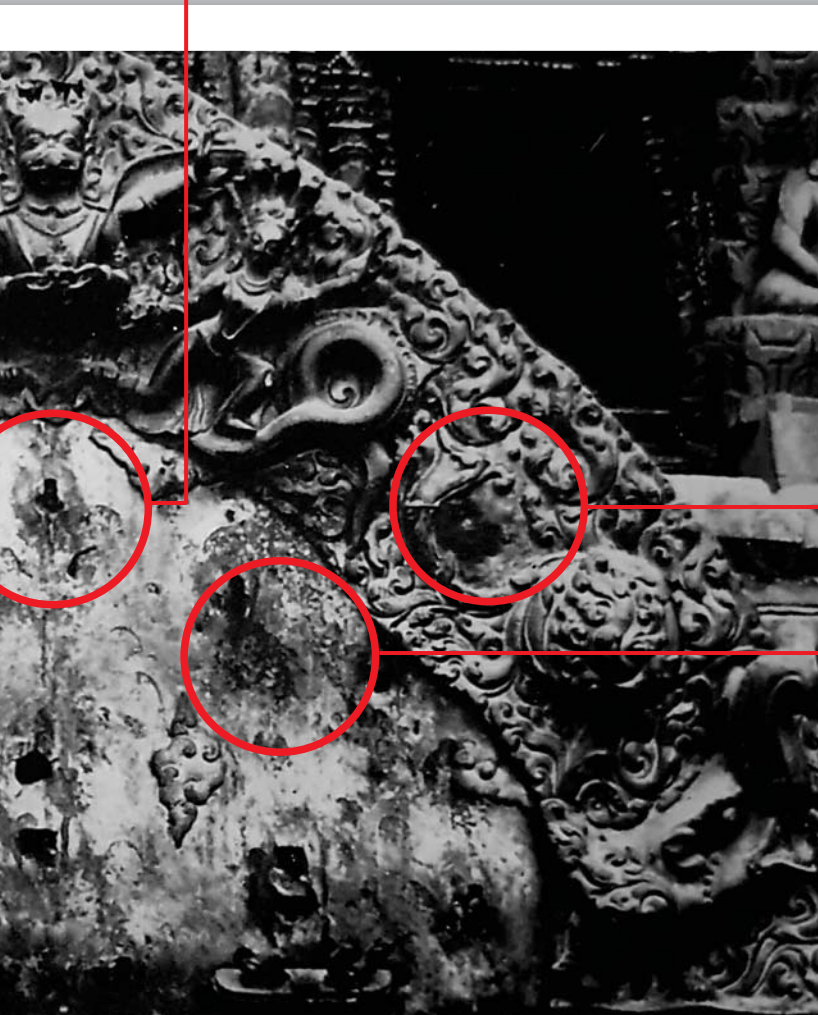
Art historian Mary Slusser had also documented pictures of the original statues before they were stolen one by one. The thefts from Mulchok were documented in German scholar Jurgen Schick's book, *Gods are Leaving the Country: Art Theft from Nepal*, in which he writes, 'One of



Panchamukhi Hanuman (Hanu Bhairab)



Shiva Gana (Bhairab)



ed out 30-40 years ago. Pictures of five of those figures from the Bothams auction catalogue last week. ELFRIEDE MOELLER



Chamunda



The 12 stolen figures in the Patan frieze were replaced with replicas in 2013.

the most odious cases of art theft in Nepal was the plundering of the *torana* of the Taleju Bhavani temple in the royal palace of Patan.’ The auction was first spotted by Lost Arts of Nepal which tracked the ongoing auction at Bonhams, Paris on its Facebook page on 3 June.

Altogether 12 precious bronzes of the goddess Durga and her retinue dating to the 16th century were stolen from this site alone, and the *torana* was stripped bare. Later these bronzes were put up for sale by an auction house in Stuttgart in Germany. “Of 12 statues that were torn

out of the *torana*, thankfully five have now surfaced at the auction in Paris, so we now know where they are. I hope in the near future we will find the other seven as well, and they will be returned to Nepal,” says Rohit Ranjitkar of Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) who is involved in the restoration of temples and monuments in Patan. This is the latest in a series of repatriations of stolen Nepali objects from collectors and museums abroad. On 15 April, Nepal welcomed back an 800-year-old Laxmi-Narayan figure from the US, which was stolen nearly 40 years ago from Patan’s Patko Tole. The statue was first located in 1990 at a Sotheby’s auction and was later spotted at the Dallas Museum of Art. The deity will be restored to its original shrine. Since then, four other statues have been returned to Nepal from collectors and museums in the United States: a 13th century carved temple eave depicting an Apsara, a 14th-century gold seated Buddha in Bhumisparsa Mudra, a 15th century seated Ganesh, and a 13th-century Chaturmukhi Shivalinga

from Art Institute of Chicago. Emiline Smith, lecturer of Criminology at the University of Glasgow says, “Many countries around the world have been deprived of their rich cultural heritage for centuries through the exploitative and colonial looting and trafficking of cultural objects. Those countries have requested their cultural heritage back for decades, and now it finally seems like the ‘repatriation debate’ is gaining momentum.” “While museums have attempted to work with claimants to return heritage as part of their decolonisation efforts, much more work needs to be done in this area – and not only by museums, but also by private collectors, auction houses and other stakeholders. Much like museums, auction houses should hold the objects they trade to the highest level of scrutiny,” Smith says. In 2010, a bronze Garuda water spout, the centrepiece of the Sundari Chok in Patan Darbar, was also stolen. However, it was retrieved by police a year later in Kathmandu before it could be smuggled out of the country. The exquisitely carved original



Also the Guimet

Even as the Bonhams auction was suspended came news that there are two other stolen religious objects from Patan that are in a warehouse of the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques Guimet in France (a 12th-century Vishnu with Laxmi and Garuda, which was stolen from Chyasal in Patan in late 1970s and another 12th-century statue of Uma-Mahesvar stolen on the night of 23 May, 1984 from Nasmanatol in Bhaktapur) which also need to be returned. Art historian Lain Singh Bangdel had documented these two stolen figures in his book *Stolen Images of Nepal*. Bangdel’s late daughter Dina was working with the curator at the Guimet to get the statues back to Nepal before she died in 2017. American art crime professor Erin Thompson says, “Museums have started to wake up to the reality that stolen Nepali art needs to go back to Nepal. But dealers, auction houses, and many collectors are still ignoring the continuing crime of depriving Nepal of its heritage. The only way to stop the market of stolen cultural heritage is to stop the demand. No one should be buying cultural artifacts from Nepal because every example of ancient or sacred artifacts from Nepal whether in a museum or on the market, was stolen.”

figure is now on display at the National Museum in Kathmandu, while the Sundari Chok has a replica bronze created by artisans at the KVPT. In 2013, the Department of Archaeology had also approached the KVPT team to make replicas of the 12 figures from the Mulchok of Taleju Temple frieze. “The *torana* had been stripped bare, and we had to refer to the original photographs to make replicas when we restored the Mulchok,” Ranjitkar told *Nepali Times*. Sanjay Adhikari, a heritage activist and lawyer says that Nepal’s religious objects were being actively worshipped, and are not decorative art to be auctioned or kept in museums. “They are not just metal or stone objects but our gods and goddesses we have been worshiping for generations and need to revere for generations to come,” he says. Suresh Lakhe of Patan Museum says, “I knew that they were stolen in the 1970s, and just like the Laxmi-Narayan statue that was returned from the US will be restored to its original shrine in Patkotole these figures also belong in Mulchok. These are our gods.”

VIRTUAL EVENTS

Covid-care fundraiser concert
Join *Ek Dhun*, *Ek Saath* and *Ek Ek Paila's* fundraiser concert raising money to purchase and distribute life-saving Covid medication in rural Nepal. The concert will be streamed on *Ek Dhun*, *Ek Saath's* Youtube channel.
19 June



Mithila Art Session
Take some time off and register to be a part of Mithila house's virtual Mithila Art Weekly as well as Weekend Sessions for kids and Adults. Find fee details on Mithila House's Facebook Page.
Registration deadline: 13 June, 9818659805, 9808578684

The Guardian Project
The Lucie Foundation has put out an open call for the Guardian Project in support of the Pathshala South Asian Media Institute for documentary photographers and photojournalists. 50 participants of the project will feature in an online exhibition. Find details at www.luciefoundation.org/programs/open-call/
Deadline: 30 June

Art Exhibition
Look at the Museum of Nepali Art's online exhibition, Shilpakalakarita ko pratibimba, which will include traditional and contemporary Nepali artwork in various mediums. Details at www.mona.com
12 June-2 July

Tony Hagen Grant
Entries for the Tony Hagen Foundation Film Grants, which awards Rs150,000 in support to three young Nepali documentary filmmakers for Kimff, are now open to accept concept papers. Visit the Kimff website for details.
Deadline: 11 July

READING RESOURCES



Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya
Browse through the collection of Nepali archived content, including manuscripts, newsletters, sketches and photographs on the Madan Puraskar Pustakalya at www.madanpuraskar.org.

ISOLATION READING

The Wayward Daughter
Shradha Ghale's often autobiographical novel offers aspects of life in a Janjati family and portrays a rich cross-section of Nepali society, showing how caste, class, and gender influence everyday life in Kathmandu.

Old Demons, New Deities
Tenzin Dickie's *Old Demons, New Deities: Twenty-One Short Stories from Tibet* is the first English-language anthology of contemporary Tibetan fiction available to the western world.

The Remittance Village
Ramesh Sunam's book, *Transnational Labour Migration, Livelihoods and Agrarian Change in Nepal: The Remittance Village* precisely details the economic, socio-cultural and even political forces that shape the livelihoods of rural people, among which is transnational labour migration (TLM).

The World That Belongs To Us
Edited by Aditi Angras and Akhil Katyal, *The World That Belongs To Us: An Anthology of Queer Poetry from South Asia* is a collection of contemporary poetry from the subcontinent and its diasporas. Includes works from Hoshang Merchant, Ruth Vanita, Suniti Namjoshi, Kazim Ali, and more.



To Live
Élisabeth Revol's *To Live: Fighting for Life* on the *Killer Mountain* tells the story of her and her climbing companion Tomasz Mackiewicz's heroic rescue from the Nanga Parbat by two Polish climbers who were on K2 at the time, and the trauma of the harrowing descent.

Children's Digital Library
Looking for ways to keep children occupied? The International Children's Digital Library has children's books from all over the world, including *Adventures of a Nepali Frog* by Kanak Mani Dixit from Nepal.

Comic Library
Find a variety of comic books available from the British Council Digital Library, including the likes of as *Star Wars*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *Disney classics*.

Poetry Foundation
Discover all things poetry. Browse through collections of classic and contemporary poems, readings, poetry news and the entire 100-year archive of *Poetry Magazine*. Go to www.poetryfoundation.org to start.

PHOTO ARCHIVES



Nepal Picture Library
Look at archived photographs from throughout Nepal's history and learn the stories behind the iconic images at www.nepalpicturelibrary.org.

Photo Museum Nepal
Access hundreds of thousands of old historical photographs of Nepal and learn the significance behind them. Visit their website <https://photomuseumnepal.org>.



Digital Archaeology Foundation
Look at historic photographs from Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur durbar squares, and watch 3D reconstructed videos of temples around Nepal. Visit the Digital Archaeology Foundation website for more details.

World Press Photo
Browse through the World Press Photo's (<https://www.worldpressphoto.org>), archive of powerful award-winning press photographs and photo stories from around the world.

Project Apollo Archive
The Project Apollo Archive on Flickr, created by photographer Kipp Teague, is an online repository of more than 16,000 digital images of NASA's manned lunar landing program from 1969 to 1972.



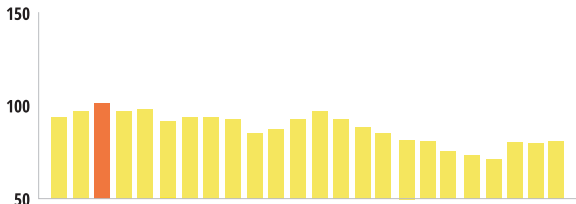
Amazing Libraries
Take a virtual trip to 11 historic and beautiful libraries around the world through the Amazing Libraries Google Earth tour, including the New York Public Library, Klementinum in the Czech Republic, and Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Egypt.



All this week, the monsoon has been playing cat-and-mouse with a lingering westerly jet stream over Nepal. The first monsoon wave entered eastern Nepal from the Bay of Bengal on Tuesday, heralded by a fanne of thunder and lighting. But in Kathmandu, the frontal system got blown away by the westerlies. But the monsoon is expected to consolidate itself by Friday, dumping the first heavy rains. Weather models predict above average precipitation over most of Nepal. Read story page 10-11.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
26° 19°	26° 19°	24° 19°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



The Air Quality Index (AQI) measured in Kathmandu had been elevated this week because a massive plume of fine sand whipped up by wind in the Thar desert, and carried over north India and into Nepal. However, with the arrival of the first wave of monsoon showers in Kathmandu, the AQI has once more dropped. The graph above shows hourly AQI measurements between 9AM on 9 June- 9Am 10 June, and indicates a direct correlation between rainfall and concentration of particulates in the air.



OUR PICK

Sebastián Lelío's multiple awards-winning 2017 Chilean drama *A Fantastic Woman* follows aspiring singer Marina, a young transgender woman living in Santiago in Chile, whose life is upturned following the death of her partner Orlando. Following his death, a grieving Marina is forced to grapple with how the police, her friends, and Orlando's family treat her as her actions are picked apart and scrutinised. Stars Daniela Vega, Francisco Reyes, Luis Gnecco, and more.

CAREER IN MEDIA

You are looking to make a career in media.

You have first language spoken and written English.

Style and clarity in writing are your forte.

You are also proficient in Nepali.

A good visual and design sense.

Eager to learn and explore new ideas.

You have video skills, or can learn fast.

You believe journalism is not just a job.

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Nepali Times has been looking for all this while.

Send us a 300 word essay about why we should invite you to join the Nepali Times newsroom.

editors@nepalitimes.com
by 1 June to 20



Join the Club (House)

The lowdown on the sensational app that has taken many hostages, even in Nepal

Some of you will remember the roaring 90s, when AOL chat rooms were a way to pass time talking to, or flirting with, strangers. Well, two decades later here comes Clubhouse.

The difference is that Clubhouse is voice-based (no texting allowed) and on mobile (not available on



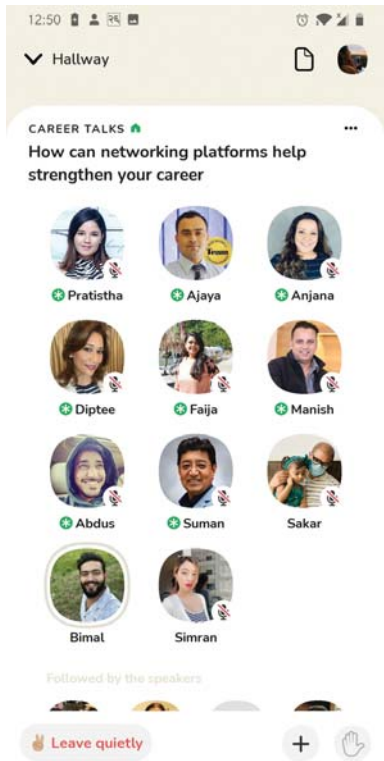
TECH AWAY
Saniaa Shah

desktop or tablet). Treading on the toes of many other social media platforms, Clubhouse has made its way into our mobile app galleries as a *social audio* app that is now trending worldwide.

Clubhouse is a voice-only app that allows users to drop in and out of 'rooms' created to explore a specific topic through instant voice chatting, almost like a phone call. It is a virtual world where conversations are called Rooms and are usually launched by a Club, run by people who are enthusiastic about a particular area of interest.

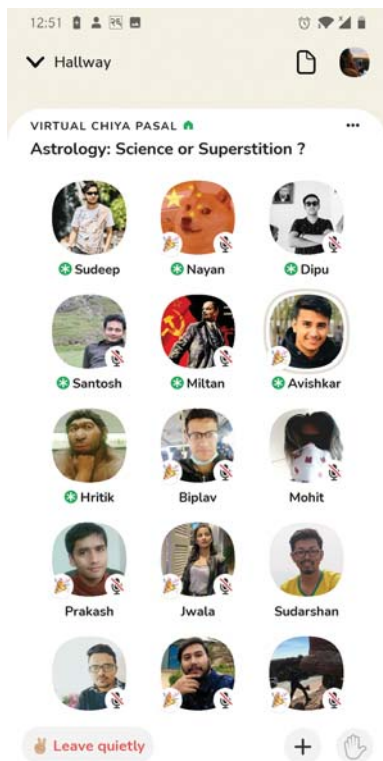
Each room has Speakers, who are visible immediately once you enter a room and see the 'Stage' section of the app page, out of which at least one person is a Moderator, whose assigned role is to host everyone, mute users, remove users from the room, and pull up a listener or audience member to become speakers.

The invite-only app allows



existing users a handful of invites to dole out to their friends who they think will take to Clubhouse. You enter a room muted, and if you want to speak, you raise your hand and a moderator can invite you to speak to everyone. The 'Leave quietly' button is a crowd favourite and the home page is called your Hallway, which only shows active conversation rooms.

The platform thrives on ephemeral content, with audio recordings that disappear instantly once the conversation



is over and the room is closed. Clubhouse is an opportunity for introverts to be social, as the lack of video feature makes it a more comfortable, welcoming space for those who feel shy or conscious in front of new people.

The app fills a void formed by the pandemic and serial lockdowns, a unique time in history that has made many people feel lonely and bored. Compared to the performative nature of Facebook usage and exhibitionist style of Instagram feeds, Clubhouse

seems to be more equitable and meaningful.

That said, Clubhouse comes with its downsides. Its addictive nature is worrying. It causes FOMO. Users have complained that it feels like everyone is selling something, whether it is themselves, or their business. Personal ego and desire for popularity can hinder the quality of conversation, as everybody dives into all kinds of rooms as and when they like.

Moreover, Clubhouse rooms do not always stick to the stated topic of discussion, as people meander with their anecdotes and trailing thoughts. Many users have begun to find it time-consuming and toxic, after entering a few disappointing rooms and wasting their time.

One anonymous Nepali user says, "Other social media do not compare to the dopamine rush it gives you; you are speaking to strangers and getting immediate feedback in return."

For many Nepalis, Clubhouse has been a convenient outlet for discussing socially sensitive topics such as divorce, interracial relationships, LGBTQIA+ matters. When signing up, the app only requests you to share your phone number and name which makes it easy for those who seek privacy to engage publicly using a pseudonym.

A few popular Nepali clubs on the app are 'Virtual Chiya Pasal', 'Nepali Kurakani', 'Entrepreneurship in Nepal', 'Tech Talks Nepal', and 'Traveling Nepal'. Clubs that existed outside

Clubhouse have found a new platform to foster an existing community, such as Toastmasters Nepal and Routine of Nepal Banda.

From cyclists to environmentalists, stoners to football fans, Clubhouse serves as a space to find fellow enthusiasts of every kind, giving a strong sense of community to those who struggle to find their kind offline.

User Asmita Pradhan demonstrates how subjective experiences can be, by sharing her story of attending a 30s club hosted by a Nepali in the US that many thirty-something Nepalis found relatable and insightful. She says, "Everyone in that room connected at some level, giving each other support. That's probably the best one I've attended so far, where I could be myself."

RJs, podcasters, motivational speakers and comedians have flocked to Clubhouse after not being able to speak to live audiences due to the pandemic. Being naturally talented orators, they enjoy hosting and interacting with an audience, only without professional editing, sound effects, transitions and ad breaks.

The pandemic has given people a lot of free time, and users have been logging on at all hours, even in the middle of the afternoon, because they are working from home and taking full advantage of it. 🇳🇵

Saniaa Shah writes this fortnightly column, *Tech Away for Nepali Times*, and runs *Studio Aakar*, a film production studio.

आजको आवश्यकता, घरबाटै खाता

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आफ्नै घर वा कार्यालयबाट www.himalayanbank.com/accountopening मा गई आफ्नो अनुकूल अनुसार हिमालयन बैंकमा खाता खोल्न सक्नुहुनेछ । बिना कुनै डर, वा भ्रूण्ट, तपाईंको बचत गर्ने चाहनालाई सम्पन्न गर्न एक सरल, सहज उपाय ।

विस्तृत जानकारीको लागि नजिकको शाखा वा फोन नं ४२२७७४९/४२४६२९८ मा सम्पर्क गर्नुहोस् ।

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Nepal braces for monsoon-p

Covid-ravaged Nepal is facing another high risk flood and landslide season

● Sonia Awale

By any measure, the past year has been disastrous for Nepal. The Covid-19 lockdowns devastated the economy, the 2020 monsoon killed a record number of people, and this year the second wave hit with full force even as governance was paralysed by a prolonged power struggle in the ruling party.

Now, Nepalis are bracing themselves for their second monsoon season during the pandemic, one which meteorological modellers say could dump above normal precipitation over most parts of the country.

The other difference with last year is that the second Covid-19 wave is even more virulent and widespread. This means crowded shelters after a flood or landslide will be hotspots for new infections at a time when only 4% of the population is vaccinated.

“Covid and floods are contradictory in nature, as one needs physical distancing while the other makes it impossible to do so. This will add to the existing burden,” says epidemiologist Lhamo Yangchen Sherpa.

She adds: “We can’t prevent floods, but we can reduce its impact. We must concentrate on identifying risk groups and their emergency evacuation, set up shelters with physical distancing, stockpile tents, food and emergency medicines including oral rehydration salts and water purifiers.”

Even though last year’s southwest monsoon was said to be ‘normal’ in Nepal, it triggered numerous flash floods and

landslides, killing at least 400 people and destroying over 1,000 houses. Entire villages in Sindhupalchok, Jajarkot, Myagdi, Baglung, Kalikot and Bajura districts were buried.

The South Asian Seasonal Climate Outlook Forum (SASCOF) has forecast ‘above normal’ rainfall for most of Nepal this year, with more than usual precipitation in most of the Mahabharat and Himalaya, and slightly deficient rainfall in the eastern Tarai.

“There is a possibility of floods, landslides and other water-related disasters occurring together during the third and fourth week of July this year when the second wave of the pandemic will still be peaking,” states the government’s National Monsoon Preparedness and Response Plan 2021.

The probability of flash-floods and landslides are even higher this year because of the wildfires. There were 7,000 fires affecting 75 of Nepal’s 77 districts from November 2020 to May 2021, the highest number ever recorded.

The fires reduced forested slopes to ashes, incinerated the undergrowth, thus reducing the absorptive capacity of the soil. When the rains come, the water will therefore rush down the slopes instead of seeping into the topsoil.

“This year’s rainfall is forecast to be higher than last year’s average. Based on this analysis, it can be estimated that there will be a significant increase in landslides and floods during this year’s monsoon,” says meteorologist Shanti Kandel at the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology.

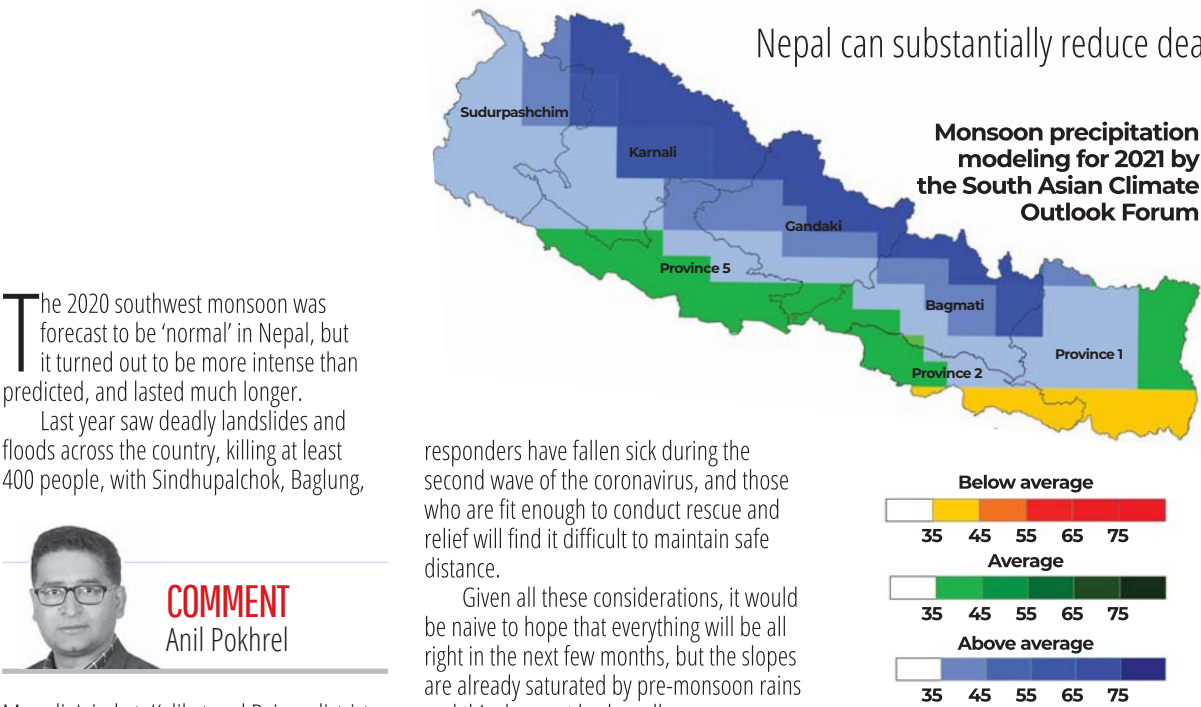
She adds: “Forecasting is preparedness in some ways. But it has to be effectively communicated, so if we are to wait until landslides have occurred to act, it’s too late and there is no point.”

In the past, the government has faced criticism for prioritising relief over prevention. This could change with the formation of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA), which



A disaster resilient Nepal is possible

Nepal can substantially reduce deaths and damage from all kinds of disasters by 2030, and here is how



The 2020 southwest monsoon was forecast to be ‘normal’ in Nepal, but it turned out to be more intense than predicted, and lasted much longer.

Last year saw deadly landslides and floods across the country, killing at least 400 people, with Sindhupalchok, Baglung,



COMMENT
Anil Pokhrel

Myagdi, Jajarkot, Kalikot and Bajura districts bearing the brunt of the disasters. Entire villages were buried and debris houses swept away rocks, trees, bridges and houses.

We are now bracing up for the 2021 monsoon season, and it is predicted to be much more intense than last year. The South Asian Climate Outlook Forum has forecast that this year’s monsoon precipitation will be ‘above normal’ almost throughout the country.

This year’s monsoon comes after the worst wildfire season ever, and it could make this year’s monsoon even more destructive. Wildfires that raged for months burnt through forest-shrub cover, undermining the ability of mountain slopes to absorb rainfall and prevent soil erosion. This could potentially result in more landslides and floods.

Then there is also the Covid-19 pandemic, that is now raging across the hinterland, and has further compounded the challenges in responding to monsoon-induced disasters. Many local first

responders have fallen sick during the second wave of the coronavirus, and those who are fit enough to conduct rescue and relief will find it difficult to maintain safe distance.

Given all these considerations, it would be naive to hope that everything will be all right in the next few months, but the slopes are already saturated by pre-monsoon rains and this does not bode well.

Here at the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA) we are committed to reducing losses in lives and livelihoods by:

- Preparing joint response during the pandemic to landslides, floods and water borne diseases with federal, provincial, local governments including District Disaster Management Committees for swift rescue and relief operations.
- Closely working with the Nepal Army, the Armed Police Force, Nepal Police, community groups, non-profits, development partners and the private sector.
- Improving Early Warning System and communicating disaster risks in more effective ways.
- Prepositioning search and rescue equipment including relief items.

While preparing for this year’s

monsoon, we have also begun to look beyond 2021. With the right policies and actions, we can achieve our target of substantial reduction of disaster risk and loss of lives and livelihoods by 2030. It may sound ambitious, but we have a vision to pull it off in sync with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030).

Through this year’s budget program, the government has unveiled a 10-year campaign to build *Suraksit Nepal* -- a disaster resilient Nepal which will fast track actions to ensure safety in not just future earthquakes, but other hazards.

The 10-year campaign to build a resilient Nepal will use our valuable learning and insights from post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction. In the first few years after the 2015 earthquake, Nepal received unfair bad publicity in the international media for sluggish reconstruction, but the

National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) quickly made up for lost time to achieve its mandate. The NRA’s completion of post-earthquake recovery despite the 2015-16 border blockade and the 2020-21 lockdowns is a model for other countries. Nepal is planning an international conference next year to share this success story. To wrap up the post-earthquake recovery, the government has allocated the budget to build 14,155 more classrooms, 105 health facilities, 195 cultural monuments and 36 government buildings. Similarly, reconstruction and retrofitting of heritage buildings and completion of 39 integrated settlements also feature prominently in this year’s budget.

This year’s budget also allocates money for disaster preparedness, search, rescue, relief, and rehabilitation. This includes programs for disaster risk financing, helicopters for aerial firefighting, multi-hazard early warning system, multi-purpose robotic firefighting equipment in all provinces, advanced fire brigade, multi-seater ambulance, rescue vehicles and fire trucks at all local levels.

This is the first time Disaster Risk Management has featured so prominently in Nepal’s national budget. Disasters are traditionally seen as acts of god in Nepal, this is why there was little will to work on prevention.

We now see a paradigm shift in this thinking. We are moving from response more towards preparedness and risk reduction. Rather than waiting for disasters to happen and spending financial, human and institutional resources on rescue and relief, our new emphasis in this decade is on disaster risk reduction and preparedness for effective response.

As part of the 10-year campaign to build a disaster resilient Nepal, we need to plan, design and implement:

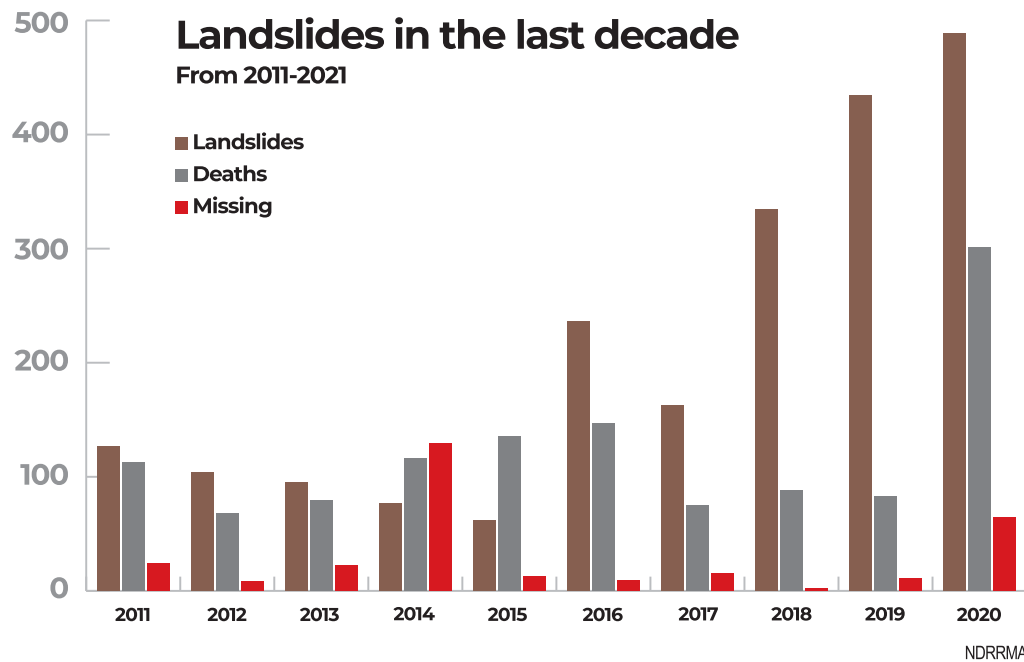
- Multi-hazard risk assessment and mapping
- Establishment of a national platform to communicate risk information
- Early warning system using all forms of media for all hazards
- Disaster risk financing with insurance of private houses and public buildings
- Integrated settlements for communities at high-risk locations
- Guidelines and system to reconstruct infrastructure damaged by disasters
- Revision of the building code to integrate key risks such as floods, fire and lightning and create incentives for implementation
- Reduction of Glacial Lake Outburst Flood risks
- Design standards to integrate disaster and climate risks for roads, water supply and irrigation
- Establishment of Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority at all seven provinces
- Establishment of Emergency Operation Centers at all seven provinces, 77 districts and key municipalities with high risks
- Building capacity of provincial and local governments to integrate risk considerations into development planning
- Restructuring of NDRRMA to include a Training and Research Directorate for disaster risk reduction

Successful completion of these tasks will lay the groundwork for the 10-year plan. Its success will not only save lives and livelihoods, but also reduce recurrent economic damage and loss from disasters. 🇳🇵

Anil Pokhrel is the Chief Executive of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA).

-pandemic double hit

A landslide in Jajarkot district following a heavy rainfall in 2020.



works primarily on preparedness and mitigating risk, while delegating more rescue responsibility to first-responders in local governments.

“In earlier years landslides were not discussed as part of our monsoon preparedness plan, only floods were, and this year we set landslides as a priority for preparedness and response also looking at the intersection of wildfires, Covid-19 and the monsoon,” says Anil Pokhrel, who heads NDRRMA that has produced a workplan for monsoon preparedness and response. (*See op-ed, below*)

The NDRRMA with DHM recently trained officials in 36 municipalities in nine of the most high-risk districts (Myagdi, Gorkha, Kalikot, Rasuwa, Sindhupalchok, Bajhang, Jajarkot, Syangja and Dailekh) on Impact

Based Forecasting which predicts extreme weather events so that at-risk groups can be ready.

“We are dealing not just with floods and landslides this time, but also Covid-19. Local communities are setting up rapid response teams to best prevent an outbreak in shelters and maintain health protocols, and spreading awareness through FM radio in local languages,” says Liladhar Adhikari of the NDRRMA.

Despite the 'above normal' forecast in the models, climate scientist Ngamindra Dahal expects the monsoon to even out unless Nepal experiences cloudbursts over the Mahabharat and Chure ranges. These sudden heavy showers have been the cause of the deadliest floods and landslides in recent years.

“We now have the technology to predict

localised cloudbursts through Impact Based Forecasting which is crucial in saving lives, all we need now is real-time action so local communities get advance warning,” says Dahal.


But predicting and determining the impact of floods and landslides only from the perspective of weather gives us an incomplete picture. The climate crisis has changed precipitation patterns and made extreme weather events more frequent and destructive. Poorly designed and built roads, bad engineering, and unplanned settlements have disturbed fragile mountain slopes, making them more disaster-prone.

"We have in recent times recorded 105mm rain per hour in Surkhhet, 100mm in Bajhang and 73 in Kulekhani which is a clear indication that the monsoon is getting more intense, but we are only now trying to understand this trend," says Dahal. "We need to see whether there are indeed more frequent cloudbursts, or if the disasters are more noticed because they affect new settlements in floodplains and roads that follow river banks."

At the NDRRMA, Liladhar Adhikari agrees that in addition to rapid response and rescue, a new development model is crucial in preventing multiple hazards in the long term. "New infrastructure has to adhere to environmental safeguards so that they do not drastically alter the rural landscape and make them more vulnerable to disasters."

Unfortunately, Nepal's approach to development has been at the expense of nature preservation. The annual budget announced last week will allow quarrying on the already-unstable slopes of Himalayan foothills to export stones and aggregates to India.

Epidemiologist Lhamu Yangchen Sherpa has been to several emergency shelters recently, and points out that there is an additional burden on women during disasters.

She says: “Like before and during this coronavirus crisis, women are especially vulnerable in the aftermath of a disaster, we must support them with security in shelters, physical and mental health care during this monsoon in the middle of a pandemic.” 

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All rise

We start this regular Backside column with a mandatory singing of Nepal's national anthem. Please stow your tray tables and stand in an uptight position. All together now: 'Resham phiriri, resham phiriri ...'

You may now sit. In times of turmoil, we need to remind ourselves of the symbols of nationhood that are important to us. The national flower: rhododendron. The national bird: ङेफे. National animal: the ass. And the knational knife: khukri.

However, our serious attention has been drawn to reports that text books are still being sold to students containing maps of Nepal in which an appendectomy has been performed on Limpiyadhura. All publishers are required forthwith to replace the appendage and restore our national pride.

Who says Nepal is languishing? This government has registered a momentous milestone in the country's history by installing an overhead bridge at Baneswor intersection. No previous jabberment was able to take such a Great Leap Forward.

How can the country ever get ahead if we are not proud of our country's achievements, precisely because there is so little to be proud of? We have to re-instil a sense of national pride by singing the anthem, because during the lockdown schools and cinemas have stopped playing them.

The Ministry of Tourism and Jingoism therefore must immediately make it compulsory for the national anthem to be sung lustily at every opportune moment, beginning with:

- The national anthem should be obligatory at the start of every Zoom online class. This is because students are out of practice and may have forgotten the lyrics.
- All Netflix users in Nepal will henceforth have to stand and sing along as the national

anthem is played before every streamed movie. Failure to do so will result in prosecution under the draconian National Security and Seditious Act that deprives said perpetrator of his/her/its Netflix account for a period not exceeding 6 months, and/or a \$25 fine, or both.

- Television news readers are required from the next fiscal year to start the evening bulletins by singing the national anthem in a duet with their co-anchors.
- All flights descending into Kathmandu airport shall play the national anthem on the cabin intercom as the aircraft enters Nepal's air space, and just after the pre-landing safety announcements. At this point, all Nepali passengers will be required to stand, as a mark of respect, even if the Fasten Seat Belt sign has already been turned on.
- Members of the Lower House of Parliament will have to sing the notional anthem every time the legislature is reinstated by order of the Supreme Court.
- All ATMs throughout the federal republic that are still in working condition and have not yet been vandalised will have to play a fast-paced version of the national anthem after the pin code is entered and before dispensing cash.
- In the national interest, all party palaces will be required to play a folk-rock version of 'Sayon Thunga Fool ka Hami' during weddings instead of Bollywood numbers so guests can dance along.
- It has always been difficult for the authorities to enforce the rule that no Nepalis are allowed into Kathmandu's casinos. After the lockdown, management will play the national anthem every time the roulette machine starts spinning. Nepalis will then naturally stand up, allowing casino security to nab them.
- From now on, all Nepali members of mountaineering expeditions will have to sing the national anthem with gusto on reaching the summit of Mt Everest. Non-Nepali climbers can sing *Resham Phiriri*.



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